

## High Trust Environments

If you have ever been part of a group in which every individual could be totally relied on to do what they say... if you knew that nothing would get in the way of fulfilling the promise - then you have been in a high-trust environment...

In *The Software Development Edge*, author Joe Marasco states that 'high-trust environments [HTEs] are extremely efficient and effective' and describes the qualities evident in high-trust environments as:

- ✓ TRUSTING each other to tell the truth.
- ✓ DEPENDING on each other to do whatever it takes.
- ✓ PUTTING THE ORGANISATION'S OBJECTIVES AHEAD of personal or group objectives.
- ✓ ASSUMING INTELLECTUAL HONESTY in all discussions.
- ✓ NOT TAKING COMMITMENTS LIGHTLY: viewing missed commitments as violations of trust [implying both volition and competency].

Intuitively, we see the efficient and effective potential to HTEs. HTEs are the lubricant within teams and partnerships of any sort, including personal partnerships - the equivalent of reducing friction in a machine, in that more of the energy goes to producing work [good stuff] and less to producing heat [bad stuff]. Marasco adds that 'In general, it is easier to have high trust in small, relatively homogeneous groups. As teams get larger, more dispersed, and more diverse, it becomes harder to maintain a high-trust environment.'

### A Broader Context: the Key

Contained in Marasco's list of qualities is undoubted evidence of high-trust environments. However, once we view the list in a broader context, we see that those qualities are symptoms, not causes. You cannot induce trust where there is not the frame of mind to create it. Thus, it is our contention that people experience intellectual honesty only through state of mind... and then only when it is clear and uncontaminated by tightly held judgements, views, opinions etc. In this way, they are more likely to follow through with commitments, focus on the common good - and trust others will do the same. STATE OF MIND is the key to high-trust engagement.

It makes sense that a clear, uncluttered, non-judgmental and open mind is functioning at peak: the natural commonsense and sound judgement we possess before we get into the maze and complexity [and the trap] of all we assume as true. At this self-aware peak, there is nothing we cannot discuss, and the size of the group is irrelevant.

### That We Think: it's a Frame of Mind

The critical factor is self-awareness: knowing that we think. This deceptively simple self-knowledge allows us to make the connection between what we are thinking and how we feel, at any given moment. We are thus more conscious of our state of mind, better able to see our capacity to create thoughts, and better able to discern whether they are serving us well, or distracting us from the main game. We are high-trust individuals.

"Synergy is almost as if a group collectively agrees to subordinate old scripts and write a new one"

Stephen R. Covey

Conversely, if we are unable or unwilling to see that we think - see that we have the capacity to create our truth; we are trapped. We may be able to recognise the distrust or suspicion present, but we are fatally trapped in our own game [our own truth] and unable to suspend what we are thinking. We are insecure, reactive, complicit, low-trust individuals: unable to see the part we play and importantly, unable to change the status quo. Ah, but what happens when high-trust individuals enter low-trust environments?

### Securing the Aim

We know that high-trust individuals have commonsense and sound judgement to guide them - a direct result of their secure state of mind. They are aware and awake to insecure and reactive behaviour. Hence, they are more able to stay open and responsive to insecure and reactive colleagues. These individuals are focused on maintaining healthy relationships to secure the aim - not their personal agenda, but the common goals of the organisation. They trust in the healthier capacities of other people, even when that healthy capacity is not in evidence.

Sound naive? Not so. In many ways, high-trust individuals actually create high-trust environments. They are indeed the lubricant within the team, irrespective of its make-up... able to soothe friction and provide a steady influence on low-trust individuals. ■ ■